

news

FOR PARTNERS IN EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT IN ALBERTA

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FEBRUARY 2008



New minister at the helm

Moving emergency management agenda forward

Developing a world-class emergency management and response system will remain on the front burner for Alberta's new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Lac La Biche MLA, Ray Danyluk.

Minister Danyluk is one of 18 ministers that make up the face of Premier Ed Stelmach's new cabinet. All of the ministers received an individual mandate letter from Premier Stelmach that outlined the Premier's expectations for each ministry.

"The Premier has clearly indicated in my mandate letter that accelerating the implementation of the emergency preparedness initiative is one of my ministry's specific priorities," said Minister Danyluk. "This mandate letter constitutes a contract between me, the Premier and the people of this province and I take that contract very seriously."



Ray Danyluk – Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing, Lac La Biche MLA.

Minister Danyluk notes that Alberta has a solid emergency management foundation from which to build on. "The government will develop the framework, but it is the men and women who work in this field who will ensure success through

their ongoing commitment and dedication. I look forward to working with them on this important initiative."

Minister Danyluk was first elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly in 2001. He has served on numerous committees including the Standing Policy Committee on Agriculture and Municipal Affairs. He is a former Reeve and County Councillor and long-time volunteer of such sports as baseball, basketball and hockey. 

*...accelerating
the implementation
of the emergency
preparedness initiative is
one of my ministry's
specific priorities.*

Alberta

Highlights



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New one-of-a-kind fire station



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Extraordinary changes, then and now



Input appreciated

Sincere thanks to everyone who provided input on proposed name changes to **FIREnews**, as well as those who reviewed the many versions of the front cover concept.

Thanks also go out to **fire etc.** for their assistance and perseverance in getting the first of the inset photos indicated on the front cover masthead.

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Connecting the dots... to safer communities

Input from people in the fire service is truly helping make **FIREnews** an even better publication. 

Changing times

Acting Fire Commissioner's message

It seems fitting that the move to four issues a year of **FIREnews** coincides nicely with the new changes in government... from a new premier and a new minister to a new fire commissioner too.

With the growing needs of the fire service, the need for more frequent communication and information has also grown. No surprise, then, that the focus of this issue is change and growth.

To ensure the continued vitality and responsiveness of the publication, I encourage you to provide feedback on each issue and to also suggest topics and articles that are of interest to you. We'll do our best to include them in future issues.

As we go to print, I say my farewells as the Acting Fire Commissioner and look forward to handing the reins over to Alberta's new Fire Commissioner, Rick McCullough. 



Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample

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Alberta

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Introducing Alberta's new Fire Commissioner

EFFECTIVE FEBRUARY 1, 2007, Rick McCullough takes the reins at the Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO). Hailing from Saskatchewan, Rick has served as Saskatchewan's Fire Commissioner since 1991. He began his career in the fire service in 1968 as a firefighter with the Canadian Forces and progressed through various positions, including fire officer, fire chief and Principal of the Saskatchewan Fire College to the position of Fire Commissioner for the Province of Saskatchewan in 1991.

"I am looking forward to joining the FCO's team in Alberta and doing what I can to continue moving things forward," said McCullough. "I am very encouraged by the province's increased focus on public safety overall and recognize the significant positive momentum that has been created by the FCO in conjunction with the Fire Service Advisory Committee. Good things are on the horizon."

Among his many credits, Rick was responsible for the initial design and implementation of the Office of the Fire Commissioner's Strategic Plan and

served on the department's performance measurement and public accountability task group. He also has practical experience as a trades person, working both as a contractor and sub-contractor on a variety of building and construction projects.

Rick has also served on several committees such as the National Research Council on the task force for Objective Based Codes, the implementation of the New Code Development System and as an ex-officio member of the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes. He has also been on the Board of Governors for the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress for the past 10 years, and is currently the Secretary Treasurer for Fire Prevention Canada.

Beyond his work world, Rick has been an active volunteer in the community, serving on the Board of Directors for the University of Regina Rams Football Team,



Rick McCullough, Alberta Fire Commissioner

and recently completed a two-year term as the team's president. Rick is also an avid long-distance runner, and in 2002 completed the Boston and New York City marathons. 

Alberta Emergency Management Agency update

Acting Managing Director named

Internationally renowned crisis management expert Mark Egener has been appointed Acting Managing Director of the new Alberta Emergency Management Agency while the recruitment process for a permanent managing director continues.



Mark Egener

"There's a commitment from the Premier and the new Minister to move ahead with plans to build a world-class emergency management and response system," said Egener. "We've made significant progress in terms of bringing the Fire Commissioner's Office and Emergency Management

Alberta together for a more proactive and coordinated approach to disasters and emergencies. We want to keep the momentum going." Egener is the former head of the former Alberta Public Safety Services. For the past seven years he has been President and CEO of Summit Enterprises International Inc., a consultancy specializing primarily in crisis and risk management. 

Extraordinary changes, then and now

Think back to the early days of fire service in Alberta... horse drawn wagons, little to no protective gear and often limited sources for water in close proximity to fires. Now fast forward to 2007. What an incredible difference in almost every aspect of the fire service. In addition to well-equipped fire halls and enhanced equipment, today's firefighters undergo extensive training and are required to be prepared for a diverse range of calls. To get a better sense of what has changed over the years and the issues that fire departments are now facing, **FIREnews** talked to fire chiefs from small and large fire departments across the province.

Leonard Zebedee, Fire Chief for the High River Fire Department, says the greatest change he's seen in his 32 years in the fire services is the protection and safety of firefighters. "This may be dating me, but when I started with the fire service we did not have self-contained breathing apparatus or bunker gear. We were true smoke eaters." Zebedee points out that there have been many changes to the fire service, including apparatus and equipment design, along with the application of foam made for today's firefighting. "Firefighters now ride inside the units instead of on the tail boards and even the theories about firefighting have come a long way over the years," he added.

High Level Fire Chief Rodney Schmidt agrees. "To me, today's biggest challenge is the level of expertise in fire service



High River Fire Department, horse drawn pumper, High River, Alberta [1907]

*...when I started
with the fire service we did
not have self-contained
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smoke eaters.*

members now as compared to when I joined the fire service as an 18 year old in 1989. There is an expectation that when you call 911 you get the same service no matter where you are. Fire departments, especially those in smaller communities, need to meet that challenge with trained and qualified personnel. Gone are the days of just doing what we can. The public has an expectation, right or wrong, and it has to either be communicated on the level of service the public is provided or the department must rise to meet that service expectation. Either way it is a challenge to deal with," advises Schmidt.

The biggest change Randy Wolsey, Edmonton Fire Rescue Services Fire Chief, has seen in his 34 years in the fire service

is in technology. "To keep abreast of the technology in new products for fighting fires and performing rescues and the complexity of the technology used in the construction of buildings, automobiles and industry, there is an increased demand for elevated levels of training and certification for firefighters." That thought was echoed by Schmidt: "Last year, my members put in over 6,000 man hours on training alone, and sometimes we feel we are left behind."

"Technology has had a huge impact," added Brad Mason, Taber's Fire Chief. "On the positive side, improved materials and design of turnout gear and personal protective equipment (PPE) result in safer firefighters. As well, improved technology in fire suppression such as foam, CAFS, PPV, etc., allows for faster control and extinguishment of fires, and improved apparatus design introduces new technology and safer trucks."

Bruce Burrell, Fire Chief for the City of Calgary, points out that the change in generational values is a challenge as well. "Traditional values and structures will be tested and most of us in senior positions have trouble adjusting to the new

values systems being introduced. As the 'boomers' retire and we recruit more 'Gen-X' members, we are going to have to be conscious of what motivates them and the potential for cross-generational conflict in our stations."

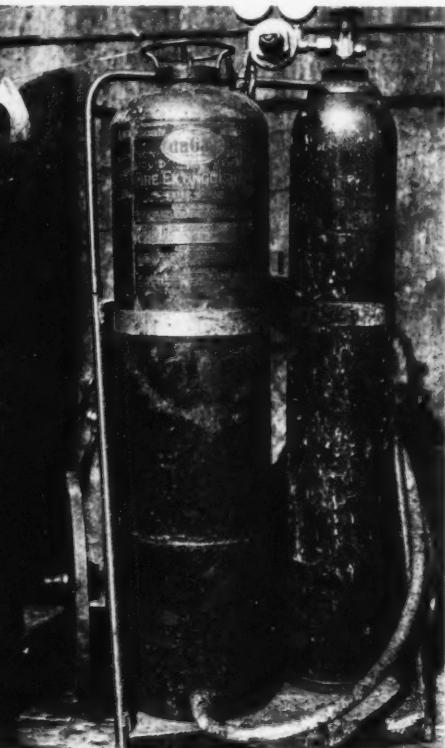
"To me, the biggest challenge in the fire service is the new type of risks that firefighters are facing," notes Judy Harvie, Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office, who works extensively with Aboriginal communities to educate them on fire/injury prevention and encourage members/youths to take training to help within their own communities.

Another change is the scope of services provided within the fire service. Brian McEvoy, president of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association (AFCA) and Fire Chief for the Bonnyville Regional Fire Authority, points out that "we now provide rescue services (vehicle, high angle, water, urban collapse, etc.), public education in both fire and injury prevention, medical services, disaster planning, 911 service, communication services, etc."

Structure fires and motor vehicle collisions ranked high before and while motor vehicle collisions continue to be a top response, alarm investigations, medical assist and first response and rescue calls are the majority of calls now. "Now, first-responder medical calls make up over 65% of our calls," said Wolsey. That was echoed by McEvoy, who noted that if his fire department did medical responses it would be one of the top three calls.

Leduc County Fire Chief Bob Galloway agrees. "What I see as the biggest change is the complexity of emergency calls that the public expects firefighters to respond to and mitigate. This may be partially the result of television and movies or it may be because the actual number of fires appears to decrease each year and the fire departments are picking up new roles. Whatever the cause, it has had a major effect on time and costs to train and equip firefighters for their additional duties," noted Galloway.

Public interest and perception are indeed huge issues to deal with, and combining that with the incredibly diverse and complex aspects of the fire service creates a bigger issue. "Fire service leaders face different challenges today than in the past," noted Burrell. "Budgets are under greater scrutiny and so are our behaviours. Leaders have to be able to juggle change initiatives, business practices, human resources, public and media relations, statistical reporting, capital projects and response levels all at the same time. Add to that the increased public and political interest in how we provide our service, who we are recruiting and how our members behave, drive, and appear – these have all become daily issues in fire service management."



Du-Gas Fire Extinguishing Apparatus Test,
Turner Valley, 1929.



Two fire department members, Calgary, early 1900s.

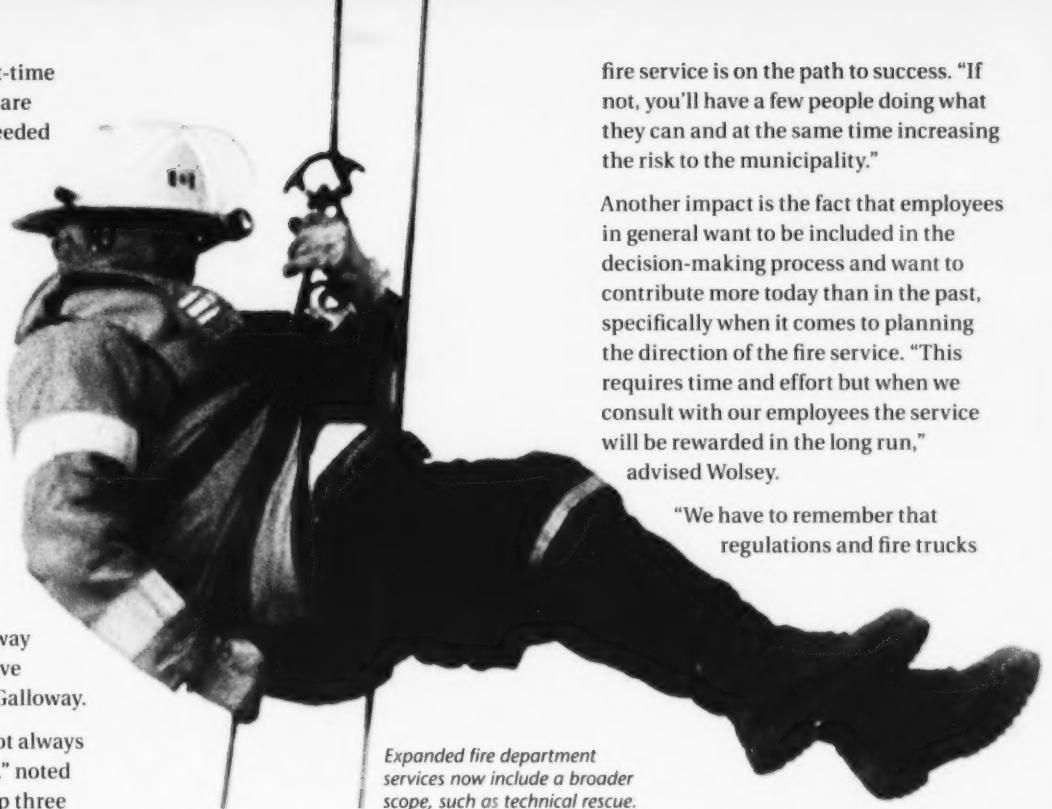
It's no surprise that growth in the province is top of mind for fire departments. "The biggest challenge is keeping up with the changing environment in Alberta," said McEvoy. "As the fire service, we need to be at the table with government and get more involved in discussions around changes that impact us. But we also need government to work with us to develop a better system for getting and staying involved. Often bureaucracy can have a negative impact on the small and volunteer services in Alberta, making it harder and harder to recruit and retain members. This is significant, as over 80 per cent of fire services in the province are volunteer."

Mason agrees. "In rural Alberta, the biggest challenge is recruitment and retention, be they volunteer, paid on call, full-time or anywhere in between. As senior members retire, we must have the resources to replace them and must develop effective recruitment and retention programs that can compete with our current workforce and economy."

continued on next page >>

Galloway points out that part-time and/or volunteer firefighters are struggling to commit time needed for fire/rescue services since they are busy with full-time jobs, family commitments, working additional hours and being moved from job site to job site. Not to mention the fact that many employers are reluctant to let staff leave to respond to emergency calls. "I know of many departments that can barely staff one fire truck during the daytime hours and rely on mutual aid for backup. Unfortunately, the backup may be 20 minutes away and that may be too late to save lives and property," advised Galloway.

"The typical volunteer does not always have time to respond to calls," noted Harvie. "While a list of the top three



Expanded fire department services now include a broader scope, such as technical rescue.



Thermal imaging cameras are becoming standard equipment

calls ultimately depends on the fire department's location (rural or urban), in Aboriginal communities one of the main calls is motor vehicle collisions."

Equally concerning is the ability to keep current with the growth of our community. "Recruitment of volunteers and retention, funding for equipment, training and moving to full-time personnel means that we are slowly moving towards regionalization and integration of fire and EMS services with other communities in our response area," added Zebedee.

Schmidt admits that the fire service has definitely changed for the better, but with ongoing growth all across Alberta and the increasing training and safety requirements, he cautions that municipalities need to ensure that their

fire service is on the path to success. "If not, you'll have a few people doing what they can and at the same time increasing the risk to the municipality."

Another impact is the fact that employees in general want to be included in the decision-making process and want to contribute more today than in the past, specifically when it comes to planning the direction of the fire service. "This requires time and effort but when we consult with our employees the service will be rewarded in the long run," advised Wolsey.

"We have to remember that regulations and fire trucks



New equipment benefits from improved technology, which reduces risks for fire personnel and the public.

One-of-a-kind fire station opens in Edmonton

A\$4.4 MILLION FIRE station unveiled on November 22, 2006 in Alberta's capital city set a model for future fire stations in Edmonton and across the country.

"We are incredibly proud of our new station, which gives our firefighters all the features they need to perform at their highest level. This will ultimately improve response times for Fire Rescue Services and greatly benefit the safety of our citizens," said Fire Chief Randy Wolsey.

Located in the city's west end at 87 Street and 167 Avenue, the station, which is staffed by four firefighters and a captain 24 hours a day, is equipped with a number of innovative features, such as the Locution Public Safety Alerting System, which provides fully-automated dispatch. Edmonton is the first Canadian city to install this system. "One key benefit of this new dispatch and alerting system is that it uses both a fully automated human voice as well as lights



Edmonton's newest fire hall is the first of its kind in North America.

and display equipment to alert rescue crews," advised Devon Card, Manager of Emergency Communications and Resources for the City of Edmonton. "The automated dispatch can then clearly

deliver the same message to multiple locations simultaneously, making the dispatch centre more efficient."

The system also provides automatic visual indicators such as light bars and reader boards, providing more information to responding crews. Station 25 is the first station to have all the components fully installed and it is expected that all the remaining fire stations will be equipped with the system in the New Year. The new station also includes a drive through apparatus bay, turn-out gear room and lecture room for service training. 

Detailed features

In addition to the Locution Public Safety Alerting System, highlights of the special features of the new fire station include:

- **Drive through apparatus bays** – this feature is designed to make it safer for the public when fire crews enter and exit the fire station. There are three bays, 22.8 metres in length.
- **Turn-out gear room** – with drying racks and separate ventilation system, which protects firefighter safety gear and extend its life.
- **Exercise room** – complete with weights and modern cardiovascular workout equipment, helping keep firefighters fit for duty.
- **Lecture room** – can also be used as an alternate Emergency Communications and Dispatch Centre.
- **Community drop-off room** – all community donations can be stored for the many charities the station participates in.
- **Airlocks** – a minimum of two doors between the apparatus floor and living quarters.
- **Vehicle exhaust system** – each bay is equipped with dual vehicle exhaust tracks.

Risk Watch Champion Conference 2006

The 5th Annual Risk Watch Champion Conference was held November 1-3, 2006 at the Hyatt Regency in Boston, Massachusetts. The conference provides a forum for Champion Management Teams (CMTs) representing *Risk Watch* in the U.S., Canada and England to share experiences and learn from each other as we work towards reducing the number of preventable injuries. Alberta's involvement in *Risk Watch* was well represented this year including Western Canada's National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) *Risk Watch* Field Advisor and Mentor Tim Vandenbrink, along with Dave McKenna, Ken McMullen, Ken Fuhrmann and Jan deLeuuw from the Alberta CMT, Assistant Deputy Minister for the Public Safety Division of Municipal Affairs and Housing Ivan Moore and Assistant Fire Commissioner Mahendra Wijayasinghe.

The conference consisted of various presentations, including keynote speaker, Barbara Underhill, Canadian World Figure Skating Champion. Barbara took

us on her personal journey of world-acclaimed triumphs and devastating losses. In 1993, Barbara's life was shattered when she experienced the loss of her eight-month-old daughter Stephanie in a drowning incident at their home. In her memory, the Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation was founded and is dedicated to childhood injury prevention and safety education. Barbara believes she has a responsibility to share her life journey with others and to help them find purpose, meaning and wisdom in life's greatest challenges.

It was a privilege to have Ivan Moore at this year's conference. Ivan's presentation, *Risk Watch Promotion in Alberta; Government as Champion*, provided insight into the provincial government's roles and responsibilities surrounding public safety. Support for local government is achieved by recognizing the need to manage community risk at the local level and providing support for municipalities to implement the programs in their communities. Ivan

also outlined the active government partnership with the *Risk Watch* Champion Management Team and the promotion of *Risk Watch* to other departments and local governments. He noted that *Risk Watch* is supported by Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing and he believes proven injury prevention programs like *Risk Watch* should be promoted and put in all Alberta communities.

Each year, the conference organizers provide valuable opportunities to learn from and network with



firefighters, paramedics, educators and other professionals dedicated to injury prevention, and this year was no exception. The presentations provided valuable insight into the challenges of media relations and team dynamics and how individual determination can produce success for advocates in the area of injury prevention. Breakout sessions provided small group exploration of such topics as *Risk Watch* 101 for newcomers to the program, Safe Community Events & Best Practices and Evaluation of the *Risk Watch* Program as well as three different sessions on the subject of children and motor vehicle-related injuries.

As the Alberta CMT returned home, we felt revitalised and confident that we are moving in the right direction and that collectively the work being done by various organizations and individuals in our province is on par with or ahead of other provinces, states and countries. The Alberta CMT would like to thank the NFPA for their continued support and for providing the travel and accommodations that allow us to attend the CMT conferences. 

If you or your department would like further information on *Risk Watch* or need assistance or direction on implementing this injury prevention program, you may contact the following: Alberta CMT email gcfdem@telus.net or contact the Fire Commissioner's Office at (780) 427-8392 (dial 310-0000 for toll-free access outside of Edmonton).

Provided by Dave McKenna, Lt. / EMT; Grande Cache Fire Department & Peace Country Health EMS Alberta *Risk Watch* CMT – Team Leader



Ivan Moore, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Safety Division, Alberta Municipal Affairs presenting at the 2006 Risk Watch Champion Conference in Boston.

Now available...

New Canadian Risk Watch®

The new Canadian *Risk Watch* program is now available in print and on CD. CDs can be purchased from the Ontario Fire Marshal's Public Fire Safety Council's distribution centre for \$20 per CD or \$100 a set, which includes PreK-K, Grades 1-2, Grades 3-4 Grades 5-6 and Grades 7-8. Canadian *Risk Watch* binders are also available for purchase from the Council's distribution centre. Binders are \$50 each or \$250 for a five-binder set that includes all five *Risk Watch* levels. To order the CDs or the binders, please call 1-866-379-6668, extension 106, or access the Council's website at www.firesafetycouncil.com.

The CDs contain both *Risk Watch*, the English version, and *Sécurité en tout temps*,[®] the French version. Binders are also available in English or French.

The new *Risk Watch* program is distinctly Canadian. The activities and tools in *Risk Watch*, which were developed based on consultations with teachers and injury prevention experts across the country, make it easy for teachers to incorporate *Risk Watch* lessons into their daily lesson plans.

The new program includes Canadian statistics and resources for each risk area and references Canadian legislation. It also focuses on Canadian and regional topics (e.g., the use of ATVs and snowmobiles, rural considerations, ice safety, forest fires). Detailed lesson plans with more challenging, age-appropriate activities are provided. Expanded activities, also included in the program, extend learning into the home and community.

The Alberta *Risk Watch* Champion Management Team (RWCMT) believes the new *Risk Watch* program is an incredibly powerful teaching tool that has the capability of reducing injuries significantly in future generations. A limited number of *Risk Watch* CDs are available from the Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office to teachers who have taken a workshop on the program from the RWCMT.

To arrange a workshop, please contact:

- Tim Vandenbrink, NFPA
Risk Watch Field Advisor
Email: tim.vandenbrink@edmonton.ca
Phone: (780) 496-3856 or
- Ken McMullen, RWCMT member
Email: ken.mcmullen@gov.ab.ca
Phone: (403) 287-4246. 

Safety standards for secondary suites

New construction and maintenance standards created

To help provide Albertans with safe, affordable housing options, the provincial government has established new construction and maintenance standards for secondary suites. In making the announcement on November 22, 2006, then-Minister of Alberta Municipal Affairs Rob Renner said, "The need for affordable housing throughout our province is clear, and secondary suites continue to be an increasingly important option for Albertans. Having specific standards will provide landlords with clear guidelines for suites' safe construction and maintenance, and it will help make sure tenants and their families are safe in their homes."

The new standards follow 12 recommendations from an MLA review committee on secondary suites, which are self-contained living units that include a kitchen, bathroom and separate exit created in a single-family home. The Alberta government accepted the committee's recommendations suggesting province-wide standards be included in the Alberta Building Code and the Alberta Fire Code. Standards include specifications for ceiling heights, windows, fire protection, interconnected smoke detectors, heating and ventilation systems, as well as separate exits.

Building standards for new suites took effect December 31, 2006, while fire code

standards for existing suites will take effect December 31, 2008. These dates ensure that new suites constructed meet the safety standards, while providing owners of existing suites with two years to bring their properties into compliance with the new code requirements.

Municipalities will continue to choose whether to develop bylaws allowing secondary suites in their communities, as well as deciding which areas may be zoned to permit secondary suites. 

For more information, including building and fire technical bulletins related to secondary suites, visit www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/ss_SecondarySuites.htm

Learning anytime, anywhere

Yet another evolution of the fire service is the move to electronic learning. Since 2001, Edmonton Fire Rescue (EFR) has provided online learning for its 900 members and staff. More recently, EFR launched a learning management system that allows testing and evaluation for the theory portion of the curriculum.

The Safety Codes course, which is exclusively online, prepares the student



for provincial certification. While *fire etc.* does the marketing, registration and exam components, EFR handles the actual course delivery. According to Ellen Whybrow, Instructional Designer with EFR,

since 2005 about 200 people have taken the course via CD, and 50 have taken the online version.

EFR is also working on a new Hazmat Operational course that it anticipates providing in Fall 2007. Designed to include two components – theory and

practical – the online portion will provide all aspects of the theory component, including high quality videos and an extensive data base. The student's fire department would be responsible for the practical component.

"Having e-learning enables us to offer our members and other firefighters the opportunity to enhance their training at their own time, in their own location. It's a win-win situation for everyone," adds Whybrow. 

For more information about EFR's e-learning, visit www.efityraining.com or contact Ellen Whybrow at ellen.whybrow@edmonton.ca

AFCA update

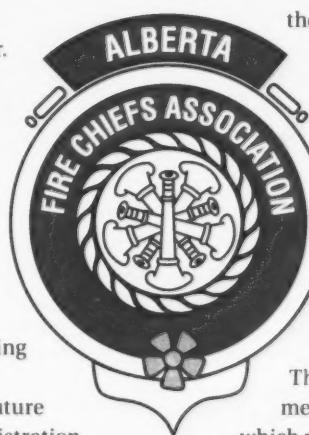
Keeping you informed about activities

The Board of the Alberta Fire Chiefs Association has been involved in a number of issues since we last communicated with you.

- The conference planning committee has been working on the 2007 AFCA conference, which will be held June 10-13, 2007 at the Mayfield Inn in Edmonton. Since it's our 60th year, the theme for 2007 is "Diamonds in the Rough." The committee has put together an exciting program that will be of interest to the volunteer as well as the career firefighter. Please mark your calendar now.
- The announcement of the amalgamation of the Fire Commissioner's Office and Emergency Management Alberta did raise some questions. However, after a series of meetings with Alberta Municipal Affairs, the Board is supportive of the move.
- The resolution regarding fireworks in the Alberta Fire Code is still being considered by the Minister's office and we will monitor the progress of this important issue as Municipal Affairs proceeds with the consultation process.
- We now have a full Board of Directors. Bill Graham, Barrhead Fire Chief, was

elected as the Region Two Regional Director. Bill brings a wealth of experience to this position and will represent his region members well.

- By mid January 2007, the association will have an enhanced website. This will allow for online ordering of material from the bookstore as well as future online conference registration, members forum and many other features.
- The resolution from the 2006 conference regarding radio frequencies has not been responded to by Industry Canada. There is also an initiative by the Solicitor General's department to move forward with the "Alberta First Responders Radio Communication System". This system is intended to provide a backbone for inter-agency communications. All AFCA members are advised to follow this issue to determine the impact on



their individual operations. For more information, contact project manager

Alan Melenka at 780-422-9707 or by email at alan.melenka@gov.ab.ca

- A committee was formed at the 2006 conference to represent AFCA in discussions with *fire etc.*.

The committee requested AFCA members to complete a survey, which received very good feedback and response. As a result, we will be meeting with the President of Lakeland College and the Dean of *fire etc.* in January to review the concerns and issues identified in the survey. Thank you to everyone who completed the survey.

As we move into 2007, new challenges will continue to face the fire services in Alberta. Your association will continue to proactively work on behalf of all fire services. 

Submitted by Brian McEvoy, AFCA President

Greater interoperability for first responders

HERE ARE A NUMBER OF police, fire, EMS and public safety agencies radio systems in place in Alberta but, because they were implemented at different times with different manufacturers' technology, they cannot communicate with each other. Further, these radio systems are at various stages in their life cycle; many of them are aging and in need of replacement.

Today, during disasters (e.g., the Pine Lake tornado in 2000, the fire at Edmonton Waste Management in 2005) or visits by dignitaries (e.g., the Queen's visit in 2005, the G8 Summit in 2002), police and public safety agencies are significantly limited in their ability to collaborate, coordinate and cooperate with each other to ensure public safety. Situations occur that require first responders to leave their jurisdiction, rendering their radio communications inoperable.

Given Alberta's current radio communication limitations, there is a concern that first responders will be significantly hampered in their efforts to support Albertans during a larger scale emergency. To this end, the Government of Alberta is embarking on a major initiative to implement an exclusive wireless network dedicated to the interoperability of the communications systems of first responders in the province.

The purpose of the Alberta First Responder Radio Communication System (AFRRCS) Initiative is to:

- develop and implement a shared, province-wide wireless network that includes the necessary infrastructure for call/dispatch centre operations to meet the current and future needs of public safety agencies;
- work in partnership with the police and other public safety agencies to provide effective and efficient emergency communication services in the interest of public safety and public service;
- enable police and public safety agencies to exchange timely, accurate, relevant and complete voice and data information;
- facilitate inter-agency cooperation when the need arises, allowing easy coordination of inter-agency operations;
- maximize the safety of Albertans when emergencies and disasters occur;
- enhance the safety of police and public safety officials; and
- allow for information sharing among first responders, when required.

Emergency Management Alberta (EMA) is playing a significant role in this initiative. It is the objective of EMA to ensure that the communication needs of all first responders in a disaster scenario are taken into account, including fire, ambulance and police agencies, traditionally seen as first responders, and other agencies, such as utility companies, social services, etc., who may only play a first responder role for the duration of a disaster response. The initiative is expected to take several years to complete.

It is the objective of EMA to ensure that the communication needs of all first responders in a disaster scenario are taken into account, including fire, ambulance and police agencies...

A major first phase of the initiative is the completion of an "AFRRCS Needs Survey" which has currently been forwarded to all municipal governments and fire departments in Alberta. While the possibility exists that copies of the survey form come from a number of different sources, each municipality is only expected to complete the survey once. It is critical that municipalities be encouraged to complete the survey and send it, and that the needs of the municipal disaster services agency through the local director of disaster services be considered in its completion.

The new system will use a portion of the 700 MHz band on the radio spectrum, which has been set aside by Industry Canada for exclusive use of emergency responders. Municipalities will play an important part in the implementation of the system. Plans are also underway to provide gateways into the system for municipalities who continue to operate on the current land-based mobile bands. 

Bringing Fire Prevention Week to a close

This past October, communities across Alberta received an important fire safety message as part of the 2006 Fire Prevention Week: "Prevent Home Cooking Fires: Watch What You Heat!" The message was very appropriate because cooking is the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries, and the second major cause of home fire deaths in Alberta.

Judging by the various events held throughout the province by the fire service and media, the 2006 campaign was a great success:

- 74 per cent of fire departments participated in the Fire Commissioner's Fire Prevention Week Children's Program. ATCO Gas and ATCO Electric sponsored the program and a contest for a chance to win a home computer system. The 2006 contest winner was from Edmonton, Alberta.

Participation in the Alberta Weekly Newspaper Association contest was also a success. Over half of the member newspapers provided fire prevention and safety messages in their publications during Fire Prevention Week. The first place winners for 2006 were *Fox Creek Times*, *Provost News*, *Drumheller Valley Times* and the *Brooks and County Chronicle*.

Congratulations to all winners of the Fire Prevention Week contests.

In response to the encouraging participation in the campaign, Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample said, "I would like to thank all of the organizations who assisted in bringing fire prevention and safety

...cooking is the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries, and the second major cause of home fire deaths in Alberta.

messages to Albertans during Fire Prevention Week. Efforts like these help save unnecessary fire deaths, injuries and property losses across the province." 

From an insurance perspective

Near misses

The concept and understanding of a "near miss" are as varied as the number of personalities who work in emergency services. Two recent incidents that I am personally familiar with illustrate this point.

The first incident began on a clear Sunday afternoon. We received a call from someone reporting chest pain, and I was driving our medic unit. Civilian drivers were actually doing what we would like every driver to do when approached by an emergency vehicle – slowing down

and moving to the right, allowing us to continue on to the emergency. We were heading south down a two-lane highway with a posted speed limit of 55 m.p.h. I approached an intersection controlled by a traffic light.

At this point, the road changed from two lanes into three, with the far left lane a turning lane. Traffic was backed up in both of the other lanes. The turn lane was open, so I proceeded past the traffic that was stopped for the light. Because it is a one-way road, I had no concern about oncoming traffic.

At the light, a sizeable hill sat to my left, and obstructed my view of traffic going east to west. Since the light was red, of course, I came to a complete stop. As we know, or at least do not want to admit, some drivers would have proceeded right through the red signal without stopping. Fortunately, it was good that I came to a complete stop, because as I was slowing down to see if the traffic was clear, a car blew through the intersection from left to right.

That driver did have the right of way (his speed was, by my estimation, excessive),

but he did not see me and did not attempt to brake for me, even as my lights and sirens were activated. Had I driven through the light, someone would have been seriously hurt, as he would have hit me at the driver's door.

My point on this – I went back to the hospital and was talking about this "near miss." One of my co-workers stated, rather smartly, "you probably were going too fast and were just lucky anyway." Wouldn't it have been nice to hear, "good job for taking your job seriously and stopping to avoid an accident"? The fact remains that this was a near miss incident.

During the second incident, I was the crew chief going to a respiratory arrest call, and my driver was doing a good job negotiating the traffic on a two-lane highway, which separated traffic by a double yellow line. As we approached a narrow bridge, he noticed a delivery truck approaching from the opposite direction.

Here is the dilemma – two large vehicles were approaching the same bridge, which is just barely large enough to allow two cars to pass. Both of us were travelling at about the same speed of 45 m.p.h. My driver made a split-second decision to accelerate and attempt to get over

the bridge and onto a wider part of the roadway that allows a larger distance between the vehicles. Unfortunately, not everything goes as planned. Both vehicles passed on the bridge, and there was probably less than a 10th of an inch between both vehicles. As they say, luck is simply a matter of inches or seconds. Another close call – you bet! The difference between the first scenario and the second was ATTITUDE. 🔥

This article, courtesy of VFIS, was written by Dennis Mitterer, M.S., NREMT-P, CSP, ARM VFIS Emergency Services Safety and Health Auditor.

Recruitment and retention

New program developed to address major issue in the fire service

THIS IS THE FIRST OF A SERIES of articles focused on the important issue of recruitment and retention in the fire service, an issue that is affecting many fire departments across Alberta and beyond.

Much like Alberta, many other provinces are also dealing with the issue of recruitment and retention of firefighters. To address this issue in Ontario, Provincial Fire Marshall Bernard Moyle (retired) and his staff developed a comprehensive resource manual that includes strategies and tools to help fire departments implement effective volunteer recruitment and retention programs. The manual also includes information to help fire department leaders communicate what is expected of the recruit and what impact volunteering will have on families, friends and the business community.

According to the manual, the foundation for an effective program is a cyclic, ongoing process that includes the following elements: pre-recruitment planning, recruitment, selection and hiring, orientation, retention,

evaluation and exit. Designed to provide resources for all fire departments, the manual is useful for those needing to establish a formal volunteer recruitment and retention program as well as departments needing to improve their current program.

The underlying premise is that volunteer fire service personnel require and expect professional human resource management practices. Volunteers strive to provide skilled, competent and caring service. By establishing and following a formal recruitment and retention program, fire services increase the likelihood of finding and keeping the right people doing the right tasks at the right time.

Key points:

- More than one recruitment method is necessary – effective marketing and communication strategies are needed to draw the interest of potential volunteers.
- A screening process is essential in order to demonstrate that the volunteers serve in the community's best interest.

- Upon selection, a written agreement between the volunteer and the fire department will ensure that expectations and responsibilities for each side are clearly identified and agreed to.
- One of the most successful and safe approaches for developing volunteers and establishing a commitment is to initially offer specific tasks that allow them to become involved in a limited way, followed by opportunities to grow into a role with more responsibilities.
- Successful recruitment efforts should be ongoing to ensure that there is a waiting list of interested individuals to draw from.
- The long-term challenge of recruiting and training new volunteers is creating an environment in which individuals continue to be motivated, interested, challenged, supported and satisfied with the work they've accomplished.
- When an individual leaves the fire department, it is a good opportunity to solicit input to determine the department's strengths and opportunities for improvement. 🔥

Government departments work together towards solution

Like many other small communities, Alberta's Aboriginal communities are concerned with limited fire suppression abilities in some areas of the province. This includes adequate firefighting crews, equipment and training. What sometimes results is that neighbouring fire departments are the first on the scene. However, the neighbouring departments are only able to provide back-up support rather than serve as first responder.

Despite the fact that Aboriginal communities are governed through federal jurisdiction, three Alberta Government departments are working together in a cross-ministry initiative to explore solutions to the firefighting issue. As stated in a memo from Pearl Calahasan, former Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (now International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations), "fire suppression and corresponding capacity is a significant issue that has considerable implications for First Nations people living on reserves, municipalities and Métis settlements."

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, together with Alberta Municipal Affairs (now Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing) and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development have agreed to meet and work with the federal government to resolve the issue.

To date, preliminary meetings with key representatives of the three provincial government departments have met for discussion. A meeting tentatively scheduled for early February will pull

together community leaders to verify fire suppression issues. Updates on this initiative will be provided in future issues of *FIREnews*.

Other news

- The Métis Settlements Fire Chiefs Association has developed a new crest for its organization (as indicated on this page), which includes all Métis Settlement fire departments.
- The Métis Settlements Fire Chiefs Association has also recently completed its bylaws and has distributed them for review to association fire chiefs.



The new crest developed for the Métis Settlements Fire Chiefs Association.

- The Yellowhead Tribal Council smoke alarm project is now completed. A total of 500 smoke alarms were installed in homes for the elderly and others with a high risk of fire.
- Edmonton Fire and Rescue Services has again agreed to include Aboriginal students for the NFPA 1001, professional firefighter training in 2007. Métis Nations of Alberta have agreed to pay training costs for any Métis candidates, rural or urban, who would like to take this opportunity. Métis Employment Councillor Kris Gladue met with John Lamb, Deputy Chief for the City of Edmonton Fire Rescue recently to discuss a possible agreement between the Métis Nations of Alberta and Edmonton Fire and Rescue. The meeting was very positive and Edmonton has agreed to do all they can to accept Aboriginal students in their training sessions. 

Speaking of training...

As one of the first graduates of the Firefighter, Emergency Medical Technician program provided by the Alberta Fire Training School in 1995 to alleviate the financial burden of fire departments for training, Judy Harvie was also one of the few Aboriginal women in Canada to hold professional firefighter qualifications. Since her graduation, the program has been offered every year and there are always numerous applicants. "I have been involved in getting the Métis Nations of Alberta to host this program for a group of Métis since 2004," said Harvie. "The Métis Nations of Alberta (MNA) is now signing an agreement with Edmonton Fire Rescue to train Métis individuals and MNA is looking after all costs, including living expense."

Digest

In memoriam

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of:

George McCrea – The former fire chief of the Camrose Fire Department died on November 28, 2006. George joined as a volunteer after moving to Camrose in 1957. He served as a volunteer assistant chief from 1964-1970 before becoming Chief Fire Prevention Officer in 1970. He moved to Deputy Chief in 1980 and became Fire Chief in 1996, a position he held until his retirement in April 2000.

Ronald Blair Minion – The fire service also lost volunteer firefighter Ronald Blair Minion, who passed away on October 2006 at the age of 52. Ronald worked for the Warner Fire Department.

Duane Dutka – a long-term firefighter with the Valleyview Fire Department, Duane died January 6, 2007 at the age of 58. His 25 years of fire service included attaining the rank of Deputy Chief. Duane was also a businessman, former Mayor of Valleyview and a strong community supporter.

Alternate Q&A format

Under the title "You Were Asking" in previous issues of this publication, we included a number of questions and answers related to the fire and building codes. Starting with this issue, we are discontinuing that column and instead reminding readers to visit Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing's website for the latest Standata sheets. The website provides two locations for this information:

1. www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/ss_Fire.htm
2. www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/ss_discussionforum.htm

Any fire/building code issues should be directed to the Building & Fire Standards technical area (call toll-free to 1-866-421-6929) or email questions to safety.services@gov.ab.ca. Routine questions can be resolved by FCO regional Fire Safety Officers and by the Fire Commissioner's Office. Contact the FCO at 780-427-8392.

Subtle changes reflect growing readership

Hey, did you notice the changes we've made to the front cover of this issue of **FIREnews**? It's part of the new approach to the publication. In addition to increasing distribution to four issues per year, and moving to a theme for each issue, the front cover was redesigned to reflect the growing readership from a broader perspective as well as the tasks and responsibilities that those professions provide. We also added the tagline – *for partners in emergency management in Alberta* – which better reflects the wide variety of professions encompassed in our readership.

Ontario Fire Marshall

With the retirement of Bernard Moyles, the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshall has recently announced that Pat Burke has accepted the position as its new Fire Marshall.

FCO website continues to expand

The FCO website is your one-stop source of information related to the fire service. From the latest fire education campaigns to safety tips and statistics reports, there is a wide array of information about fire prevention and education as well as updates from the Fire Services Advisory Committee and more. Check it all out at: www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco_index.htm

We want your feedback...

At **FIREnews** we are always striving to provide valuable information to our readers. We also encourage feedback to help us determine new article ideas, columns and updates. If you have ideas for future articles, please send them to firecomm@gov.ab.ca.



Planning ahead

Upcoming public fire education campaigns

Every year the Fire Commissioner's Office (FCO) supports a number of public fire education campaigns and provides corresponding resources to assist fire and safety organizations in providing fire prevention and safety information to their communities. Details about the first two 2007 campaigns are listed below.

Burn Awareness Week

This year the Burn Awareness Week campaign will take place February 4-10, 2007. For the campaign, the FCO provided a Burn Awareness Week campaign kit

that addresses burn issues for high-risk groups, such as children, employees, seniors, homes, etc. Topics include burn knowledge, causes of burns, education and awareness on burn prevention and first aid.

Summer Fire Safety

During the summer months (May 1-August 31), the number of fires increase and the type of fires that occur change compared to the rest of the year. In order to promote awareness and increased fire prevention and safety during the summer

months, the FCO publishes an annual Summer Fire Safety Campaign kit, which will be available on the FCO website at the beginning of May.

Both of these campaign kits are posted on the dates indicated above on the FCO website at www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco_index.htm under "campaigns."

For more information or for hard copies of these materials, please contact Te-Jay Thompson at 780-644-4692 or e-mail te-jay.thompson@gov.ab.ca.

Connecting the dots... to safer communities

The Fire Commissioner's Office's annual fire chiefs meeting held November 23 and 24, 2006 took a different approach in providing information to fire chiefs. Instead of the usual format, the meeting began with an afternoon reception and dinner, with former Minister of Municipal Affairs Rob Renner as the keynote speaker.

The next day, short presentations were provided from 12 government branches/agencies involved with or impacting on fire chiefs in communities across Alberta. That was followed with a panel presentation

generated by questions from meeting participants. Based on feedback received, the new format was a very good approach.

To view the presentations from the meeting, visit www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca/fco_index.htm.



Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample addresses the audience.



Discussion panel members respond to questions from meeting participants.

From left: Alan Melenka, Solicitor General and Public Security; James Orr, Municipal Affairs; Gerry Baron, Safety Codes Council; Ivan Moore, Municipal Affairs; Bill Symonds, Municipal Affairs; Rick Brown, Emergency Management Alberta; Terry Wallace, Transportation and Infrastructure; Spence Sample, Fire Commissioner's Office; Jim Ellis, Environment; and Adam Gossell, Sustainable Resource Development.



Bonnie McLay and Gloria Mercer from the FCO ensure meeting registration runs smoothly.

FIREnews is published by the Fire Commissioner's Office of Alberta Municipal Affairs and Housing (AMAH) for the information of fire/emergency management professionals and others with a related interest in this field.

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